CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR FOR BRANDED HAIR CARE PRODUCTS IN RURAL MARKETS OF DISTRICT SAHARANPUR

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Submitted by

Akansha Madan

ID No: 14PHM01

Prof. (Dr.) K. Ajay Singh

Supervisor

Dr. Pankaj Misra

Co-Supervisor

Submitted to

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

IMS UNISON UNIVERSITY, DEHRADUN – 248009

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1. Introduction

India is a nation with multiple social, economic, financial, political and technological complexities. Rural areas vary greatly from the urban areas. Marketers cannot extend their strategies of urban areas to rural dwellings, as the pattern of customer behaviour differs significantly between urban and rural regions. Rural research includes understanding beliefs, habits and behaviour of rural people.

Rural customers are very innovative in outlook and highly ambitious in terms of the products they wish to purchase. They are aware of different brands available in the market. They compare a product's price with other comparable offerings. They consider seeking alternative products and shopping formats. In their buying choices, they are highly optimistic and not as brand sticky as their predecessors. They share knowledge about the products through digital platforms and offline communication with other customers. Buying a premium product for rural customers mean a quality assurance. FMCGs are the most important sector where this trend can be observed.

This study explored the prospects of branded hair care products in rural markets of Saharanpur district. It aimed at identifying the brand preference and discovering the relationship between factors that influence rural customer purchase behaviour and brand preference. This study ensures formulation of successful marketing campaigns through in-depth study of variables such as preferred pack sizes, price points, retail formats and brand preferences etc. The outcome of this research will help marketing professionals to reposition their plans on branding, delivery and advertising to effectively reach out to their target market.

The research was carried out in the villages of Saharanpur district (according to the census definition of rural habitation). Saharanpur is a vast market with a large rural population. Earning of people is sufficient to allow them to sustain a decent standard of living. They have significant demand for branded FMCG goods.

Consequently, companies who wish to be effective in scaling up their businesses in the rural hinterland must incorporate the influence factors, psychological factors and value factors in their marketing plans to achieve a brawny place in India's rural markets. Creating brand loyalty in rural market entails investing in relationship development with rural people and developing assertive value propositions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Rural Marketing

Increased farm production, widespread media access, increased accessibility to products and services, increased literacy levels, increased connectivity are the leading contributing factors that have led to exponential consumer spending (Mahapatra, 2001). In respect of location and social-cultural attributes, Indian consumers can be classified into the urban, rural and rurban classes (Jha, Understanding Rural Buyer Behaviour, 2003). By approaching lower and middle groups at cheaper prices with products in small lots, the companies experienced tremendous success (Dubey, 2006). Rural people found the packaging to be more convenient for carrying and storing a product. They believed that better packaging assured a superior product (Sehrawet & Kundu, 2007). Rural market mechanisms like *haats* and *melas* offer a powerful mix of intellectual and realistic perspectives that are useful for understanding rural marketing dynamics (Velayudhan, 2007). Formerly males used to take the decision to buy, but now the situation has changed and more rural women are making decisions. The rural females are very attentive and careful concerning their purchase decision (Kar & Kumar, 2008). Area-specific 'rural marketing' problems require more clarity and reformation. Rural growth enhancement should be the objective of rural marketing (Modi, 2009). Rural centers present enormous innovation opportunities, novel solutions and business strategies for companies (Kapur, Narsalay, Bindlish, Ahuja, & Mallik, 2010). The Census of India describes a rural dwelling as an area with: density of population less than 400 people per square kilometer, where minimum 75 percent of male workforce is involved in agricultural activities and where neither municipality nor council operates (Rural_Urban_2011.pdf, 2011). Leaders may have to modify their distribution of resources to focus on emerging markets. They must seek competent people with adequate depth of understanding regarding rural mentalities and what it requires to formulate rural strategies (Choudhary, Dewhurst, & Kshirsagar, 2012). Companies are facing challenges like dispersed rural populations, complex distribution, developing brand conviction, post-sales services, inadequate infrastructure, scattered and economically disadvantaged buyers, etc., while marketing in rural areas (Neuwirth, 2012). FMCGs have enormous potential for rural economic activity as

rural incomes are rising and consumption rates increasing (Venukumar, 2012). Rural marketing has mutated from agricultural marketing to a three-dimensional perception from rural to urban, urban to rural, and rural to rural emphasis, in respect of the flow of goods, services and ideas (Jha, 2012). In rural market television is the most popular media. Identification with the brand image had a significant impact on consumers' buying choice (Sharma, 2013). In order to be able to access these markets effectively, it is important to tailor goods according to rural customer preferences, strengthen the supply chain and logistics, engage rural consumers regarding product quality and use, enhance knowledge using rural centric media, and enforce and update legislation to control grey markets (Kumar, 2013). There is insufficient media reporting, complexity of multiple languages, and inconsistent demand that affects rural marketing strategies in the rural hinterland and inhibits them from producing the desired effect (Kumar & Dangi, 2013). Companies should focus on the strategy of high volume-low margin strategy. Businesses must employ strategies, ensuring distribution to feeder towns, from where rural retailers can obtain the products (Miglani, 2013). Corporations must develop and sustain effective manufacturing and logistics network customized to the specific needs of consumers (Kapur, Ahuja, Ramachandran, Mathur, Narayan, & Rajnish, 2013). There are multiple reasons for the spike in use of FMCGs such as population expansion, massive influx of government spending in rural programs, impact of urban relatives, rising literacy, increased foreign capital flows, reformed land tenure process, growth in customer purchasing power and consumers' willingness to upgrade living standards (Shukla, 2013). Catering to consumer preferences and ideologies through live shows is important while developing advertisement campaigns for rural markets (Martin, 2013). Unrestrained marketing deception, diverse employment patterns and patterns of behaviour make Rural Marketing a complicated, innovative and targeted activity (Rathee & Kumar, 2013). It is important to comprehend the rural marketing environment, its operating trends, and mode of income generation, spending patterns, market growth, population expansion, asset ownership and government-led rural development measures for targeting rural areas (Sekhar & Padmaja, 2014). Indian rural consumers are internet connected and highly brand aware. They use mobiles to communicate with families and in doing business. (Kapur, Nijhawan, Naokarkar, & Bhavsar, 2014). People oppose new technologies because of inability to change rigid mindsets and habits. Companies may need to

transform business models to attract low-income consumers (Simanis & Duke, 2014). Consumers purchased mostly on credit. Poor disposable income contributed to small-scale purchases in rural areas. Cost and supply challenges served as significant barriers to rural marketing (Bhattacharya & Roy, 2014). Price, brand name, quality, supply, pricing, etc. are essential factors that affect the buying decisions of rural consumers (Prakash & Pathak, 2014). A technique called BHARAT involves direct marketing, selecting appropriate dealers, embracing efficient warehousing facility, producing better product display, educating target population, supplying them helpful insights and enabling their financial assistance (Rana & Ahuja, 2014). Strategic initiatives for rural markets is premised on the systems approach. It is split into two marketing moves, pull marketing and push marketing (Achar & Wright, 2014). Business organizations with clear values are designing new concepts for trying to bring economic power to the emerging countryside (Mahajan, 2016). Rural customer is a value-conscious buyer, pursuing quality product and not essentially low price (Naidu, 2017). Implementing novel strategies for rural consumers require comprehension of the cultural background and needs of consumers (Didwania, Saxena, & Prashar, 2017). Consumers are coping with their low self-efficacy due to low functional literacy and leveraging their social networks to acquire as well as interpret the several symbolic indications on the product. This is due to the difference in the cognitive aspects that affects the 'black box' of buyers (Singh, Mukherjee, & Mishra, 2017). A 2 x 2 matrix, where one axis represented divergent opinions of the circumstances of the low-income customer (opportunity/constraint), and another axis represented diverse solutions to business model growth (bottom-up/top-down). The four cells reflected alternative business models. (Pels & Sheth, 2017). In rural towns, customers are drawn towards beauty products such as talcum powder, hair oils and moisturizers, etc. (Gulati, 2017). The rapid growth of digital penetration in rural areas, particularly broadband, is related to the current trends in social perceptions and behavior of people in rural and urban areas (Champollion, 2018). Villages are thriving grounds for social bonding, idealism, leadership and personal growth. Rural people observe religious ceremonies, practice community and caste morals and thrive in complex political, cultural and spiritual environment (Kumar, 2019). Alternative communication techniques such as community radio (CR) were adopted as a method of participatory Rural Development (RD). India's pioneering CRs (Sangam Radio and Radio Bundelkhand), used media ethnography

techniques and undertook a qualitative investigation to examine its involvement in the RD cycle by using rural voices for their growth (Patil, 2019).

2.2 Consumer Purchase Behaviour

Buyer's new selection of a product is propelled by two competing interests: the desire of buyers to gather information on alternative solutions, and their reluctance to seek risky ones (Heilman, Bowman, & Wright, 2000). Consumption is a mode of living and engaging with others. Consumption is critical for the development and social interaction of children and young adults, and serves a role in the creation of attitude and self-conception (Benn, 2003). The strong tendency of functionally illiterate consumers for substantive rationality and over-reliance on pictographic data suggested that organizations should reassess how they emphasise the additional advantages of new products or the distinguishing elements of established products. The reason why buyers could not embrace new technologies which offer distinct advancements over existing products, lay less in the financial value of the goods, but more in the consumer psyche (Gourville, 2006). Retailer satisfaction mediated the effect of brand satisfaction and customers repurchase intentions (Zboja & Voorhees, 2006). Mckinsey Global Institute research suggests that India would become the 5th largest consumer market in the world by 2025. Consumption habits will shift considerably along the way as discretionary transactions constitute a large proportion of aggregate demand (Beinhocker, Farrell, & Zinulbhai, 2007). The enjoyment-loyalty relationship starts with the product, includes the product-brand and culminates with the brand (Moraga, Parraga, & Gonzalez, 2008). Celebrity product synchronization was important for buyers and that the brand preference of buyers was affected by CBTA because of demographic features such as age and income (Sharma R., 2009). Consumers vulnerable to behavioural influences would seek to match the group norms by ensuring conformity to the groups. Reference groups have profound influence on the decision making of consumers (Sridhar, Kumar, & Murthy, 2010). The Marketing 3.0 phase is a more advanced version of the consumer-centred period where the buyer demands better solutions to collaborative, cultural and spiritual marketing practices (Kotler, Welcome to Marketing 3.0, (2011)). If the purpose of brand is ingrained in the mind of customers, they get emotionally attached

to the brand. Organizations need to promote the purpose of the business or brand to customers, create convincing stories about it and engage consumers in it (Kotler, Marketing the Mission to the Consumers, 2011). The marketing perspective needs to be changed from a differentiation strategy to market clustering and optimization and from market penetration to market growth. Similarly, social values must shift from enforcement and conflict oriented to mission oriented and commercial activity must change from localization to hybrid marketing (Sheth, 2011). Phrases and visuals are frequently used to represent the product and therefore draw customer interest. Besides that, advertising appeal had a partial mediating effect on the relationship between celebrity endorsement and buying intention (Wang, Cheng, & Chu, 2013). There is an important statistical relationship between age, class, family size and employment with brand choice. There is, however, no statistical relationship between the profession and income with brand choice.(Pradhan & Misra, 2014). Integrating consciousness-emotion-value (C-E-V) and cognition-affect-behaviour (C-A-B) frameworks is effective in the S-O-R model to explore the functional and experiential appeal (Sadachar, 2014).Traditional trade predominated in India, hence to enter this market, it is important that goods are visible in the limited stores that are accountable for bulk sales (Bhalla & Vasu, 2014). Consumption in developing countries is driven by consumers' socioeconomic status demonstrated by the product categories and the development expected in each product category. Innovative project Shakti was immensely important in probing and penetrating the Indian BOP markets (Agarwal & Xavier, 2015). Positive brand relationship acts as a mediator between the Trust, Happiness, Attitude and Loyalty. It can also moderate the link between these parameters. Trust, happiness and attitude of the brand lead to the brand loyalty (Veloutsou, 2015). Impulsive spending transactions demonstrate the propensity of buyers to buy randomly. High-impulse buyers have 'open' buying list that is receptive to spontaneous buying ideas (Prashar, Parsad, & Vijay, 2015). Customer expectations and knowledge about the product demand can be of great importance in business production processes. They try to gain useful insight into customer habits that help them improve their service offering (Mishra, 2015). Massive customers are there in the male grooming category. It's simple to get men addicted to a brand because they don't try new alternatives. They don't seek new options often and hence it is possible that mature brands will have a higher percentage of customers (Terron, 2015). Perception to advertisement and perception toward brand served as a

mediator in predicting the consumer buying intention. There was a reciprocal relationship between perception towards the brand and perception towards advertisements (Ganesan, Sridhar, & Priyadharsani, 2016). There is a substantial correlation between celebrity supporters/neutral/opponents in relation to age, gender, profession and income level, except for education and location (Gauns, Pillai, Kamat, Chen, & Chang, 2017). There is positive impact of variables like intensity, expected commitment and influence of socially conscious businesses on dependent variables like purchasing behaviour of customers (Singh & Malla, 2017). Value credibility is a major predictor of customer-brand identification (CBI), affective brand interaction and CBE. CBI serves as an important predictor of affective brand interaction, CBE and brand loyalty. Affective brand interaction and CBE are the primary contributors of brand loyalty (Rather, Tehseen, & Hussai, 2018). There is a positive relationship between age, family, and employment with frequency of purchases. Advertising, characteristics of products, intrinsic value and demonstration effect influenced buying behaviour (Chattaraj, Mazumder, & Lahiri, 2018). Consumer buying frequency, total spending, desirable store format and preferred brand depend on different demographic characteristics (Dhiman, Chand, & Gupta, 2018). Factors influencing consumer behaviour, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) program have a positive effect on the consumer's disposition, perspective and purchasing motivation (Gupta, 2019). The 'SHIFT' framework suggested that consumers are more interested in engaging in environmentally friendly behaviours when the message takes advantage of the cognitive factors like social impact, reinforcement, personal self, emotions, cognition, and service quality (White, Habib, & Hardi, 2019). There is a connection between consumer attention and company success and the mediating role of customer satisfaction in that relationship (Sampaio, Mogollón, & Rodrigues, 2019). Desire to purchase, buyer commitment, and customer trust of socially conscious companies have a strong effect on the purchasing behaviour of customers. Buyer commitment toward a socially conscious company had a significant impact on consumers' purchasing behaviour (Chaudhary, Hurrah, & Maqbool, 2020).

2.3 Hair Care Products

Conventional hair care and styling techniques are evolving. Consumers are willing to accept new brands. As a result of growing globalization and increased brand consciousness, customers are now willing to pay more for these hair care products. More female buyers exist as compared to male buyers (Bhattacharya, 2008). The happiness of the customer depends on the extent of meeting consumer requirements. A consumer may feel disappointed, pleased or extremely pleased with respect to the purchase deal (Murugan, 2010). 'Product Identity', 'Hair Care' and 'Value' are the product measurements that customers tend to use while using shampoo brands with respect to the shampoo brands. 'Brand Image' and 'Hair Care' as the most important choice for shampoo brands (Mohanty, 2012). Factors which were responsible for the shift in the attitude of the villagers regarding shampoo consumption include increased education, growing incomes, higher brand awareness, shifting occupational structure, developing connectivity, revolutionizing information technology and evolving lifestyles (Parmar, 2014).

2.4 Saharanpur

Trust plays a positive role in the desire to purchase. Sellers can greatly enhance consumer confidence by enhancing product and service perception, while assuring consumer confidence by enhancing the functionality and service perception (Yadav & Mahara, 2017). Operational, technical and strategic factors influence the adoption of e-commerce by small and medium enterprises in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh (Yadav & Mahara, 2018). It is the fragmented nature of constituencies provided by the hierarchical political system that is essentially responsible for sustaining mediating networks and perpetuating clientelism in rural Saharanpur (Singh & Hemrajani, 2018). In selected communities in Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, purdah or ghunghat (veiling) practiced by all married females in both the Muslim and non-Muslim sects play an important role in limiting and barring their inclusion in socioeconomic roles. This practice is deemed to augment the position of the female and her family in society. When women move outside the house, they have to practice stringent veiling (Devi & Kaur, 2019).

3. Objectives and Scope

3.1 Research Objectives

1. To obtain insights into rural sector growth with reference to branded hair care products in the district Saharanpur.
2. To determine the brand preference of rural people for various brands of hair care products in the district Saharanpur.
3. To explore the factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour for branded hair care products in rural markets of district Saharanpur.
4. To analyse the indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour for branded hair care products on brand preference, mediating variables being age, gender, education and family income.
5. To analyse the direct effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour for branded hair care products on brand preference in rural markets of district Saharanpur.

3.2 Research Hypothesis

1. There is a significant indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour for branded hair care products on brand preference, mediating variable being age.
2. There is a significant indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour for branded hair care products on brand preference, mediating variable being gender.
3. There is a significant indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour for branded hair care products on brand preference, mediating variable being education.
4. There is a significant indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour for branded hair care products on brand preference, mediating variable being family income.
5. There is a significant direct effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour for branded hair care products on brand preference.

3.3 Scope

This research is an endeavour to understand the rural consumer purchase behaviour for branded hair care products. The product categories chosen were shampoo, hair oil, and conditioner. The study was carried out to analyse consumer purchase behaviour of rural residents in district Saharanpur. The study was conducted for a duration of three years between 2017 to 2019.

4. Research Methodology

The study was undertaken in two phases: exploratory study and descriptive. Unstructured interviews with 100 respondents were performed in all five administrative blocks with simple random sampling technique. Descriptive research was then conducted, with the aid of a standardized questionnaire. A pilot test of 100 respondents was conducted to verify the questionnaire's reliability and the study's viability which was found satisfactory.

The study was carried in rural areas of Saharanpur district. Saharanpur has a population of 3466382, among whom males and females were 1834106 and 1632276 respectively, as per the national Census 2011 information about Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh, published by the Directorate of Census Operations in Uttar Pradesh. According to the 2011 census, 69.23 percent population consisting of 2399856 residents in the Saharanpur District lives in rural villages. Saharanpur is comprised of 408198 rural households. For administrative reasons Saharanpur District is divided into five Blocks/*Tehsils*: Behat (village number-318), Deoband (village number-236), Nakur (village number-387), Rampur Maniharan (village number -187) and Saharanpur (village number-422). Therefore, Saharanpur has a total of 1550 villages (List of villages in Saharanpur District).

The primary data was collected by selecting 203 respondents randomly from each administrative block. To decrease selection prejudice every 1500^{th} person was approached for his/her compliance to contribute to the research. The main survey was then conducted with 1016 respondents. 484 respondents declined to participate in the research. Respondents who declined to participate were asked questions based on four criteria viz. Age, gender, family income and education. That helped the researcher

to gain useful information in the survey's non-response bias. Questionnaire's reliability was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha, which was found to be satisfactory. Secondary data were collected through research articles in prominent journals, books and research reports.

The scaling method employed was identical to that of Likert's scale. For measuring the rating of a particular factor, the scale was used as follows: 1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Somewhat Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Somewhat Agree 5. Strongly Agree. The statistical tools used were descriptive statistics, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Structural Equation Modelling and Chi-square test of Independence.

5. Results and Discussions

The outcome of the study presented the following results:

1) 21 respondents comprising 5.6 percent of the total respondents preferred to use Dabur Vatika conditioner, 55 respondents comprising 14.7 percent of the total respondents preferred to use P&G's Pantene Pro-V conditioner, 186 respondents comprising 49.9 percent of the total respondents preferred to use HUL Clinic Plus conditioner, 93 respondents comprising 24.9 percent of the total respondents preferred to use Patanjali Kesh Kanti conditioner, while 18 respondents comprising 4.8 percent of the respondents preferred to use any other brand of conditioner.
2) 45 respondents comprising 6.8 percent of the total respondents preferred to use P&G's Head & Shoulders shampoo, 96 respondents comprising 14.6 percent of the total respondents preferred to use Dabur Vatika shampoo, 309 respondents comprising 46.9 percent of the total respondents preferred to use HUL's Clinic Plus shampoo, 165 respondents comprising 25 percent of the total respondents preferred to use Patanjali's Kesh Kanti shampoo, 44 respondents comprising 6.7 percent of the total respondents preferred to use any other brand of shampoo.
3) 45 respondents comprising 6.2 percent of the total respondents preferred to use Bajaj Almonds Hair oil, 113 respondents comprising 15.5 percent of the total respondents preferred to use Dabur Amla Hair oil, 332 respondents comprising

45.5 percent of the total respondents preferred to use Parachute Coconut hair oil, 198 respondents comprising 27.2percent of the total respondents preferred to use Himani Navratna hair oil, 41 respondents comprising 5.6 percent of the respondents preferred to use any other brand of hair oil.

4) In the confirmatory factor analysis of conditioner factors, the measurement model had an acceptable model fit (χ^2 =199.378, *df* =62, p≤ .05, CMIN/DF = 3.216, GFI = .928, AGFI = .894, PGFI = .632, NFI = .912, RFI = .889, CFI = .937and RMSEA =.077) based on cut off values for good, acceptable and poor model fit indices. P-value of variances as well as covariance between them of all the three factors influence, psychological and value was found to be significant (p≤ .05).
5) In the structural equation modelling of conditioner, the measurement model had an acceptable model fit. As χ^2 is sensitive to sample size, other goodness of fit indices (i.e. CMIN/DF, GFI, AGFI, PGFI, NFI, RFI, CFI and RMSEA) were also reported. (χ^2 =335.680, *df* =118, p ≤ .05, CMIN/DF = 2.845, GFI = .911, AGFI = .872, PGFI = .629, NFI = .922, RFI = .899, CFI = .947, PCFI = .731 and RMSEA = .070) based on cut off values for good, acceptable and poor model fit indices.
6) In the confirmatory factor analysis of shampoo factors, the measurement model had an acceptable model fit (χ^2= 212.062, *df* =62, p≤.05, CMIN/DF = 3.420, GFI =.955, AGFI =.933, PGFI =.650, NFI =.942, RFI =.927, CFI = .958, PCFI = .761 and RMSEA =.061) based on cut off values for good, acceptable and poor model fit indices. P-value of variances as well as covariances of all the three attributes influence, psychological and value were found to be significant (p ≤ .05).
7) In the structural equation modelling of shampoo, the measurement model had an acceptable model fit. As χ^2 is sensitive to sample size, other goodness of fit indices (i.e. CMIN/DF, GFI, AGFI, PGFI, NFI, RFI, CFI and RMSEA) were also reported. (χ^2 = 348.397, *df* =118, p ≤ .05, CMIN/DF = 2.953, GFI = .945, AGFI = .921, PGFI = .652, NFI = .952, RFI = .938, CFI = .968, PCFI = .746 and RMSEA = .054) based on cut off values for good, acceptable and poor model fit indices.
8) In the confirmatory factor analysis of hair oil factors, the measurement model had an acceptable model fit. As the χ2 statistic is sensitive to sample size, other goodness of fit indices (i.e. CMIN/DF , GFI, AGFI, PGFI, NFI, RFI, CFI and RMSEA) were also reported (χ2=195.616, *df* =62, p≤.05, CMIN/DF = 3.155, GFI =.961, AGFI =.942, PGFI =.654, NFI =.945, RFI =.930, CFI = .961, PCFI = .764 and RMSEA =.054) based on cut off values for good, acceptable and poor model

fit indices. P-value of variances as well as covariance of all the three attributes influence, psychological and value were found to be significant ($p \leq .05$).

9) In the structural equation modelling of hair oil, the measurement model had an acceptable model fit. As χ^2 is sensitive to sample size, other goodness of fit indices (i.e. CMIN/DF, GFI, AGFI, PGFI, NFI, RFI, CFI and RMSEA) were also reported. ($\chi^2 = 340.709$, *df* =118, $p \leq .05$, CMIN/DF = 2.887, GFI = .951, AGFI = .929, PGFI = .656, NFI = .954, RFI = .941, CFI = .970, PCFI = .748 and RMSEA =.051) based on cut off values for good, acceptable and poor model fit indices.
10) A chi-square test of independence showed that in terms of age, gender, education and family income, the study respondents (N = 1016) were representatives of the non-respondents.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

The majority of rural consumers were young, educated, affluent and female, close to the characteristics of previous research conducted on Rural Indian consumers. Most of these customers bought branded hair care products regularly. Women were far more likely than men to consume branded hair care products. Customers with higher average monthly income appeared to have a high preference for branded hair care products than those with lower income levels. These findings supported preceding studies that showed that differences between the gender played a major role in decision-making of hair care products. This revealed that women were more optimistic toward branded hair care products. The study also found that young people had a higher preference for branded hair care products relative to their older counterparts. It was revealed that literate customers were more optimistic toward branded hair care items relative to customers who were illiterate.

The mediating effect of age was not found to be significant in the case of conditioner and hair oil, but was found significant in case of shampoo. Hypothesis (1) did not hold true in case of conditioner and hair oil, but was true in case of shampoo. Hence, there was no significant indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour of conditioner and hair oil on brand preference, mediating variable being age. However, there was significant indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour of shampoo on brand preference, mediating variable being age.

It was found that there was significant indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour of hair care products (conditioner, shampoo and hair oil) on brand preference, mediating variable being gender. So hypothesis (2) holds true. It was also found that there was significant indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour of hair care products (condition, shampoo and hair oil) on brand preference, mediating variable being education. So, hypothesis (3) holds true. It was found that there was significant indirect effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour of hair care products (conditioner, shampoo and hair oil) on brand preference, mediating variable being family income. So hypothesis (4) holds true. It was also found that there was significant direct effect of factors influencing consumer purchase behaviour of hair care products (conditioner, shampoo and hair oil) on brand preference. So hypothesis (5) holds true.

The research can be extended to almost all FMCGs. This research assessed the factors that influence customer purchasing behaviour, which could educate retailers and rural operators and contribute to their financial success. It can provide decision-making guidance to rural marketing stakeholders and provide rural consumers with the perfect buying experience.

Study, however, suffered from numerous constraints, such as villagers continue to view an urban researcher with cynicism, the level of literacy among middle-aged rural women and elderly people is still low, local language terminology makes interaction difficult, women in some parts of rural areas live behind the veil, so communicating with them is extremely difficult.

Future research can be considered in examining the separate shopping behaviour of men and women living in rural areas. Small towns in India add tremendously to the national revenue. They serve as an important delivery source for villagers. The purchasing activity of rural people living in their proximity is greatly affected by them. A separate analysis to explain the purchasing behaviour of people living in these small towns may be considered. A substantial number of rural people utilizes toilet soaps to wash their hair. Perhaps a different research can be conducted on the brands of toilet soaps used by them. Values, attitudes and lifestyle (VAL) analysis of customers is extremely critical to explain their purchase behaviour. Hence, a separate analysis in this domain can be undertaken.

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